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The University of
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NEWS RELEASE

Nov.
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UM'S 'G. WIZ' NAMED TOP MONTANA PROFESSOR TODAY

MISSOULA—

One of The University of Montana's most popular educators has been named 2008 Montana Professor of the Year by two national organizations that promote teaching excellence – the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement of Education.

Chemistry Professor Garon Smith, better known to many on campus and throughout Montana as G. Wiz, will receive the award, along with professors from other states, at a formal luncheon and Congressional ceremony in Washington, D.C., today. He also will be honored at a brunch hosted by UM President George Dennison before the annual Griz/Cat Game on Saturday in Missoula, as well as several other campus functions before the end of fall semester.

The U.S. Professors of the Year program salutes the most outstanding undergraduate instructors in the country – those who excel in teaching and positively influence the lives and careers of students. UM professors have won the Carnegie Foundation-CASE honor nine times since Dennison began nominating candidates for the award shortly after beginning his tenure in 1990. UM holds more of the awards than any other university or college in Montana.

"Students volunteer testimonials about the quality and contagion of his teachings," Dennison wrote in nominating Smith for the prestigious award. "His teaching abilities, in a word, strike me as magical. I mean this quite literally, as any one of the hundreds of undergraduate students from varied disciplines who take his introductory Chemistry 151 course each semester can and do attest."

Smith dons a purple wizard's cape and robe to capture students' attention and regales and instructs them with fiery tricks and clever, humorous incantations that captivate them. Of equal importance, his faculty colleagues confirm that students leave Smith's course with a solid grounding in and understanding of chemistry, well prepared for advanced work, Dennison says.

When not teaching classes at UM, Smith tours elementary and high schools around the state, teaching short lessons as G. Wiz to get kids interested in science. Often, he does this on his own time and at his own expense, simply because he loves opening young minds to science. He also participates in UM-organized outreach tours throughout Montana to help recruit new students to the University.

On campus, Dennison says, peers recognize Professor Smith's teaching excellence. Through the University Center for Teaching Excellence, Smith advises other faculty members on innovative ways to become more effective classroom instructors, a talent for which he has earned national acclaim from peers around the country. In 2004, he won the Innovative Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Technology Award presented during the International Conference on College Teaching and Learning.

His popularity in the classroom has won him several other teaching awards on and off campus as well, the most important of which the students themselves bestowed. Also in 2004, Smith won the coveted Most Inspirational Teacher of the Year Award from Silent Sentinel, a senior honor society, whose leaders ask graduating seniors to vote for the teacher who most inspired them during their undergraduate years at UM.

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